these are the rules of our youth

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these are the rules of our youth

by TheSilverQueen

Summary

All his life, Hannibal has been told the same thing: "Don't be greedy, Hannibal". After the loss of Mischa and Lady Murasaki, he sees no reason to follow such a rule with Will.

Notes

This is my contribution to the Ravage Anthology! I was so thrilled to be one of the contributors for the Circle of Greed, and all of my love and appreciation and gratitude to R&J for putting this amazing project together.

Warnings: minor/background character death for Hannibal's family members

See the end of the work for more notes

PART I: MISCHA

Children can be greedy. They want more toys to play with, more sugary desserts to cram down their throats, and, of course, more attention from their parents. Even Hannibal is no exception; he too runs to his parents to show them his drawings and strives for every scrap of their attention he can command.

This, perhaps, is why his parents feared that he would react badly to the introduction of his sister, Mischa.

It is understandable. Most children don't take well to the idea that they must share the attention and hugs and kisses of their parents with younger children, especially since babies often require quite so much more than older siblings.

It is also quite unnecessary. From the moment Hannibal first glimpsed the swell of his mother's belly and realized a sibling would be in the picture, he has never been envious of the child-that-would-be. On the contrary, Hannibal spends many long nights and early mornings crooning lullabies to his still growing sister, watching his mother like a hawk for any sign of trouble, and insisting on ensuring that his mother receives the proper nutrition for taking care of two people in the same body. The day his mother brings his sister into the world, Hannibal falls in love for the first time and he memorizes every centimeter of her beautiful, squalling face.

Hannibal is not envious of Mischa. That would be silly. She is a baby and requires his protection, his care, his brotherhood.

Hannibal is envious of *his parents*.

"She's *my* sister," he tells his father when the man takes Mischa on a long walk around their property, humming tuneless songs under his breath.

"Yes, and a very good brother you've been," his father says. "But you need rest, Hannibal; you've been watching Mischa for the whole morning. We are your parents, and we will take care of both of you. Besides, we need some alone time with your sister as well, don't you think?"

"No," Hannibal says bluntly, and his father laughs.

"She's *mine*," Hannibal snarls at his mother when she tries to hold onto Mischa after a feeding session.

"Hannibal," his mother sighs. She is exhausted, hair falling out of her bun, shirt wrinkled, dark shadows under her eye. Before, Hannibal would have tucked her into bed and made her soup and swept the floor. Now, he just wants his Mischa back. His mother can find her own way into bed and Hannibal can take Mischa back and all will be right with the world. He knows the best way to burp her and wash her face and rock her to sleep. "Hannibal, please. Not now. Just let me have some time with my daughter, okay?"

Hannibal settles himself on the floor and watches them through narrowed eyes. His mother is so tired she's liable to fall asleep soon. Hannibal can rescue Mischa as soon as that happens.

It's not like Hannibal is hurting Mischa, after all. He's her older brother; it'll always be his responsibility to watch out for her.

Eventually, his mother pulls him aside. She sits him down at the table and places her neatly folded hands on the top, just like she does whenever she has bad news to give. The last time, it had been that one of their animals had died. Hannibal is pretty sure the topic isn't anything so mundane this time.

"Hannibal, dearest," his mother says, "your devotion to Mischa is . . . commendable. We're so happy that you love her. But . . ."

Hannibal blinks his eyes, but other than that he doesn't move. Others have commented on how unnaturally still he can be for a boy so young, but being still and quiet has so many advantages. It's so much easier to hear things people don't intend to say if one is so quiet they forget who is around.

His mother smiles wearily and pats gently at his shoulder. "Please don't take this the wrong way. But don't be so greedy, Hannibal."

Of course, being still and quiet does not help when one must defend oneself against an unjust accusation. Hannibal straightens. "I am not greedy, Mother."

"Oh, you usually aren't," his mother agrees. "You are polite and never object to sharing . . . when it benefits you. But attention can be something to be shared just like everything else, my son. Mischa is part of our family; she is yours as much as she is ours. You must understand; we are not trying to take her away from you. But children grow up so quickly. I cherish the memories I have of holding you as a baby, Hannibal, and I would dearly love to have some to cherish of holding Mischa."

It sounds all reasonable, except of course that his mother has held Mischa. Multiple times. Usually when Hannibal is sleeping.

Hannibal is therefore compelled to point out: "But you have held Mischa, Mother."

His mother gives him a wry look. "Not nearly as much as I held you. Please do try to understand Hannibal. It makes your father very sad that you do not trust him with your own sister."

Hannibal opens his mouth and then closes it. How can he possibly explain that it is not a matter of trust, but possession? It is ownership of the purest kind, since Hannibal watched Mischa's happy baby eyes inspire love in his heart and he allowed it grow and flourish willingly and without question. He is not taking Mischa away from his father or his mother; he is Mischa's now until his death, and if he is near her, why should he not be holding her? Trust is irrelevant, in that sense.

Then again, maybe such things are not meant to explained, any more than it is meant to be explained why mothers and fathers love children and why people grow up and why animals do not speak. Perhaps such things simply are.

“I trust him,” Hannibal says finally.

“I know you do,” his mother replies. “We would just like to . . . see that trust. Don’t be greedy, Hannibal; you’ll have the entire rest of your life with Mischa. We won’t be around nearly as long.

Don’t be greedy, Hannibal.

Hannibal buries his father first, mostly because he comes across his body first. He claws deep into the dirt and drags what it is left of his father into the grave.

Don’t be greedy, Hannibal.

Hannibal buries his mother second, because once his father’s grave is dug, it is little effort to widen the sides and make it large enough for two. He picks up rocks and leaves them sleeping together under a starlight sky with a ceiling of earth and stone.

Don’t be greedy, Hannibal.

Hannibal buries Mischa last. He goes to the roots of a great tree and determinedly attacks the dirt at the roots, widening the natural hollows as much as he can. It doesn’t take much; this tree is old and the roots are large, and Mischa – for all the life she had brought to the family in all her years – is still so small. He lays what is left of his beloved sister and ensures that he memorizes every centimeter of her, just as he had when she was born, so that he can never forget. Then he covers her, deep enough that animals will not come calling, and stands and breathes cold clouds into the air around him.

He should have been greedy, he thinks. What use was being selfless when death was at the other end of the tug of war?

Hannibal leaves that selflessness in the sweat that watered the earth of the graves and the blood that wet the stones of the cairns and the tears that dampened what little is left of his family’s remains. He leaves it there, to rot with them, and then picks a direction and starts walking.

Don’t be greedy, Hannibal.

PART II: MURASAKI

Teenagers can be greedy. They want more pocket money to buy trinkets and gadgets, freedom to run wild and stay out late, and, of course, more attention from their family. Even Hannibal is no exception; he too wants money and freedom to express himself as he chooses and do whatever he wants to do.

This, perhaps, is why his uncle feared that he would react badly to the introduction of his aunt, Murasaki.

It is understandable. Most teenagers don't take well to the idea that they must obey the commands and whims of an adult trying to replace a parent.

It is also quite unnecessary. From the moment Hannibal first glimpsed the solemn face of Lady Murasaki, he has never been envious of her position in his uncle's life or Parisian society. She is cool and strange and quiet, a noble lady who emanates regality no matter what she wears or where she goes. Hannibal looks at her mask and wishes with all his heart to master her art – or, perhaps, to break it. He hasn't quite decided.

Hannibal is not envious of Murasaki. That would be silly. She is a noble lady and requires nothing but his careful attention and courteous escort.

Hannibal is envious of *his uncle*.

"She said she would attend the screening with me," he tells his uncle, interrupting him mid-twist as he struggles with his tie. "Besides, I am already prepared."

His uncle looks him up and down and smiles wryly. "So I see. Interesting choice," he notes, gesturing at the blood-red patterned tie adorning Hannibal's chest.

"Such a rich shade of red requires boldness to carry off well," his aunt says, floating down the stairs with the same aloof air as always, "but I think our Hannibal has what it takes, do you not?" She gently smoothes her hand along his shoulder and then tweaks his tie, but her expression spells satisfaction with his attire. She even has tiny blood-red earrings dangling from her neck to match, despite Hannibal having selected his tie at the very last minute.

When Hannibal asks, she merely smiles and says, "Ah, I must be allowed to keep my secrets."

"Do not trouble yourself, Uncle," Hannibal calls, waving off his uncle from walking any closer. His horse snorts underneath him, but Hannibal merely adjusts his seat and continues speaking. "My aunt said she would be happy to come along for the tour of the estate."

"Yes, she does have a deep love for this place," his uncle says. "She can tell you about every single flower and fountain on the grounds."

"So then it is settled," Hannibal declares, and watches as the rest of the servants assist Lady Murasaki onto her own mount. When they take off, his uncle watches with carefully blank eyes, but he says nothing that night at dinner or the next day at breakfast or even the weekend when his aunt retires to her chambers for some peace and quiet.

Eventually, though, his uncle pulls Hannibal aside.

"Please don't take this the wrong way, my dear nephew," his uncle says wearily, "but I think we need to lay some things to rest."

Hannibal notes the shadows under his eyes and the slight tremble in his hands when he lays them on the table and the wrinkle in his normally immaculate attire, and he inclines his head in a regal nod. It's a habit adopted from Lady Murasaki and his uncle definitely notices, given the way his jaw clenches, but otherwise it's silent and civil as they both side at opposite ends of the table and wait for the other to crack.

His uncle breaks first. "I am . . . very pleased that you get along with your aunt. She makes me happy, but I had feared that you might think her presence an attempt to replace your mother, which she is not. She just . . . She makes me happy, Hannibal."

"I am not here to judge you, Uncle," Hannibal replies.

"Nor am I fearing judgment from you, nephew. I am too old for such concerns. But I have noticed that you seem . . . agitated when I attempt to spend time with you in a way you are not when you are with your aunt." His uncle holds up a steady hand, even though Hannibal does not open his mouth to protest; he really doesn't know Hannibal as well as he thinks he does. "I don't know why, and perhaps I never will. I only ask that you think about it. Lady Murasaki will always be my wife and your aunt, and we will always be family; we are not going anywhere. You don't need to be quite so determined to spend with her."

And, oh, but how can Hannibal possibly explain that it is the fear of loss that drives him, but not the fear his uncle thinks? For a child touched by death, there are only outcomes: a fear that drives him for the rest of his life and the embrace of death that follows for the rest of his life. Hannibal lost that fear when he lost Mischa; now he can only stare death in the eyes and let it mantle his shoulders to face the world every single morning.

He does not fear either his uncle or his aunt's death. What he fears is the loss of education that might result. His aunt has mastered the art of wearing masks so perfectly fitted the seams are invisible, and Hannibal – who at times finds himself overwhelmed with rage – wants to learn that art so well that he can fool even her. His captors used to mock him when he screamed in nonverbal rage while they crammed their cheeks with Mischa's flesh; he wants to never be at the mercy of such taunting again. He wants to be able to be so angry that the air turns cold yet so perfectly put together that not even a stray heartbeat can betray him.

Finally he swallows and tries to put together some sort of defense. His uncle found him and took him in, despite his ragged appearance and pointed silence; he owes his uncle at least an explanation to put his mind to rest.

"I have seen death firsthand," Hannibal says slowly. "I don't fear it, Uncle. I cherish it. It reminds me to take pleasure in life while I can. I don't fear your death or my aunt's; I fear the idea that there will be lessons I could have learned that I did not because I feared the judgment of society."

His uncle looks at him with dark eyes and a weary frown. Apparently, Hannibal's mask still needs perfecting.

"Very well," his uncle sighs eventually. He rises and clasps a heavy hand onto Hannibal's shoulder. "Don't be greedy, Hannibal. We are family. We will always be here for you."

Don't be greedy, Hannibal.

They hold the funeral for Lady Murasaki on a gloomy day. There is no rain, for she never would have wanted the dramatics of wailing mourners or pouring skies, but there is no sun to bring scant comfort to those in attendance. There is no open casket wake either; her time in the water degraded her body so much that she is hardly recognizable. Even Hannibal had relied upon the sight of her clothing and the familiarity of her dulled eyes to put a name to her face.

Don't be greedy, Hannibal.

He does not skip the reception afterwards, even though he wants to. He lets his mask come forward and watches as people coo over him and comfort him, despite the fact that he wants no one to touch him, much less speak to him. He takes comfort instead in the fact that no one seems the wiser as to his true thoughts. He has Murasaki and her art of perfect masks to thank for that.

Don't be greedy, Hannibal.

His uncle says nothing to him during the entirety of the funeral and the reception and the cold dinner afterwards. Perhaps he suspects the truth of what happened. He is not stupid. But all he does is pointedly leave some pamphlets for American universities on the table, despite formerly encouraging Hannibal to stay in Europe.

Hannibal had shown great restraint with his aunt. He had wanted to learn everything about her, everything that made her tick and breathe and beat, like a clockmaker who takes apart watches to learn how time is manufactured. He had held back, because he had been told not to be greedy. Now he looks upon her grave and wonders why he even bothered. What was the point of restraint when death comes calling to swallow everything whole, even that which is left untouched?

Hannibal leaves that restraint with a single batch of flowers at his aunt's grave, to rot with her. He pours himself into his art and his studies, and sketches death as abstractedly as he learns it in detail in mortuaries and medical classrooms. When an American university comes calling, Hannibal packs a small bag and leaves on the first flight.

His uncle never speaks to him again.

Don't be greedy, Hannibal.

PART III: WILL

Adults can be greedy. They want fame to bring adulation to their doorstep, money to fund luxurious habits, and, of course, more attention from their peers. Even Hannibal is no exception; he craves the most addicting kind of attention there is, and the highest price is often required for true success.

This, perhaps, is why his Will feared that he would react badly to the idea of getting a dog or two.

It is understandable. Most people don't take well to the idea that they must share the attention of their spouse.

It is also quite unnecessary. From the moment Hannibal first glimpsed the lovely, troubled face of Will Graham in Jack's office, Hannibal has wanted to know every single detail about him – his hopes and his dreams, his fears and his nightmares. He cherished every single whiff of sweat, every single fashion disaster, every single confession in the darkness. He collected every detail and stored it in perfectly preserved globes in his memory palace, and every single time Will still astonishes him anew and he *adores* it.

That being said, he still sometimes finds his mask cracking when Will spends an hour bathing his pets and not being in bed.

Will, however, just laughs at him. "It's so adorable, almost," Will muses, grinning at him from where he's covered in soap suds and dirty water. "The most fearsome serial killer in American history is jealously pouting because I'm washing a dog. That's amazing."

"I am not *jealous*," Hannibal says. "I am merely attempting to determine if that shirt is salvageable or whether our funds can support a replacement."

"Uh-huh," Will says. He bends down and presses a big smacking kiss to Winston, who barks lovingly back. "Now, why don't I believe you?"

"You've always been a cynic."

"You say that like it's such a terrible thing," Will laughs. "You love that I'm a cynic. If I was an optimistic I'd bore the hell out of you." He pauses. "Well, at least, as long as it would take for me to offend you, anyways. Sometimes opposites do actually attract."

"You were optimistic about our chances of surviving the cliff," Hannibal points out.

"Was I?"

Hannibal leans forward, letting the darkness swallow his face. He knows Will can read him better than anything, and he'd prefer no distractions just to see what Will's interpretation of his next words will be. "You left that camera running. You wanted Jack and the FBI to assume us dead after the fall, but you knew you would need proof. That's fairly optimistic to me."

Will bites his lip and then finishes rubbing Winston down. For a long moment there is silence, and then Will sheds his soaked shirt and equally soaked trousers and makes his way to their tiny bed, which can hardly fit Hannibal, much less Will and Hannibal. They make it work, of course; they don't yet have access to the kind of funds necessary to purchase something bigger and Hannibal would rather wait to ensure that no one comes after them. Besides, it's nice to be close to Will, to know what Will chooses to sleep with him in a tiny bed and all the associated aches that come with it instead of seeking refuge on the couch.

“Aw, is the big bad Ripper greedy for more attention?” Will says, straddling him with the ease of a man who knows what he wants. He lowers his mouth to Hannibal’s ear. “*Good*.”

Hannibal blinks. The voices of his mother and his uncle ring in his ear like church bells, rhythmic and annoying, yet Will disrupts the pattern with hardly any effort at all. He doesn’t even seems surprised by the way Hannibal goes tense when he hears the word “greedy”. He just tightens his grip around Hannibal’s neck and laughs darkly, as if immensely amused.

“I bet you’ve been told not to be greedy,” Will says thoughtfully, his sharp mind putting the pieces together so swiftly. “Oh well. Newsflash, Hannibal: I *like* it when you’re greedy. We all like to be appreciated now and then, as you know very well. Be greedy, Hannibal, be as greedy as you want. You want to sketch me? Sketch me. You want to make sure the only food I eat is what you prepare? Go ahead. You want to watch me tear someone apart with my teeth and bare hands? Pull up a seat.”

Hannibal can hardly *breathe*, he’s so captivated. Will is so perfect like this, unrestrained and wild and beautiful. He doesn’t want to move a muscle for the fear of losing a single second of this.

“But first,” Will continues, “I’m going to be a little greedy myself.”

“Anything,” Hannibal says, like a prayer squeezed from what little brain power he has remaining. “Anything for you.”

Will grins like a shark. “Excellent. It’s time to pay a visit to our dear friend Bedelia du Maurier.”

FINIS

End Notes

A/N: And then they live happily ever after, with Hannibal being his normal over-the-top, greedy, possessive cannibal self and Will happily indulging his murder husband.

Once again, I cannot express the depths of my gratitude to Love Crime Books for putting this project together. If you'd like to see what my amazing fellow Fannibals cooked up, please go check out the other contributions in the Ravage Anthology collection.

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